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SO YOU WANT TO HELP INDIAN AMERICANS?

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When the interdenominational missionary study on Indian Americans is concluded as of June 1956 what degree of interest can be counted upon to continue? The problems of Indians will not have been solved. In particular Indian individuals and family groups who have moved to cities from their reservation may need help we can give. This article sets forth some practical ways of continuing to be helpful.

The Situation Described

The number of Indians in Indian communities is rapidly increasing due to high birth rates and to improving health and sanitation. At the same time, because of severely limited or underdeveloped economic resources the people on most reservations find it impossible to provide for the higher standard of living they are increasingly demanding. Two remedies are available, — one is programs of reservation economic development; the second is for Indians to seek more or less permanent employment away from the reservation. Several thousand Indian Americans join the stream of migratory workers each year and follow the crops, returning to their houses on the reservation for the winter months. Other thousands become workers and residents in urban communities.

For many years Indian employables have found their own way to off-reservation living, mostly in larger towns and cities, without benefit of governmental assistance. A goodly number of these persons have lost their identification with Indian tribal life and customs. Others have made their mark in the common life as physicians, nurses, teachers, lawyers, artists, scientists, contractors, ministers, social workers and industrial workers or common laborers. Too many others have achieved only marginal status in terms of jobs, housing and community acceptance and participation.

Since 1952, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has had a placement and relocation service. In 1952 some 1,800 Indians were assisted in relocating. In 1955 nearly 3,500 Indians were aided in moving to areas of greater employment opportunity. The family groups averaged 3.9 members.

The Bureau maintains a relocation officer at 16 reservation agencies and has a placement staff in Denver, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Chicago. These persons administer Federal government funds in considerable size, — \$900,000 in the current budget of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The funds provide travelling expenses and initial rent and subsistence to those relocating. Jobs and housing are found. Beyond this initial stage of resettlement the Bureau ceases to assume responsibility.

So long as certain safeguards are observed this placement and relocation program is not only praiseworthy but necessary. These safeguards are: (a) Parallel economic development of natural resources and human skills on the reservations so that Indian Americans have an economically sound alternative to leaving their Indian communities. Otherwise the more energetic and, probably, the more capable Indians will leave the reservations in disproportionate numbers and thus radically deplete leadership in Indian communities. (b) Insure the purely voluntary nature of the procedure which means not using pressures through authority and not implying that those who choose to remain are somehow morally shameful. (c)

Adequate educational preparation for those who wish to relocate. This preparation should include some skill training and also coaching regarding the factual situations that will be faced in non-Indian communities.

Thousands of younger Indians are landless or own uneconomic inherited parcels. Only a limited number have or can get the capital necessary to start a ranching or farming operation. Many feel unadapted to the limited types of opportunity offered, especially on the reservations as they are now. As youth acquire more education, they will demand a wider range of vocational opportunities than the typical reservation can offer.

There are said to be some 4,000 Indians in Chicago today. In Los Angeles there are thought to be about 10,000. Many of these Indian women and men have established good work records. Commissioner Glenn L. Emmons reports that 350 are employed in American Aviation in Los Angeles and that the personnel officer of that factory declares they are the best workers and he is asking for more.

There are, of course, wide differences between tribes and individuals. Some, particularly those from the Eastern United States and from the Plains tribes, are relatively familiar with the expectations of the dominant culture. However, there are many who are seriously handicapped in competition with non-Indians. This is especially true of Indians from tribes farther west where they have been in contact with white people over a shorter span of time and less continuously.

These Indian Americans are likely to have some degree of mistrust of whites. They are prone to be less aggressive than non-Indians and tend to harbor feelings of inferiority and of shyness. They usually are reserved about discussing their personal affairs with strangers. Many of the older people speak little English and do not write it at all.

Tribal life in a rural setting moves at a different tempo from modern urban industrial existence. Emotional ties with the reservation community usually remain strong. Ownership of property may be involved, either as a part of the tribal estate or as inherited land.

Indians on reservations do not pay rent. Many of them never have had experience with flush toilets or running water, electricity, linen, and with scores of other conveniences and amenities that city dwellers take for granted. Indians may not know how to plan the spending of a regular weekly or monthly money income for rent, medical and dental care, groceries, clothing, utilities, insurance, taxes, savings, education and recreation. The complexities of transportation and the public services in the larger cities may well bewilder the newcomer.

Friendliness and Counsel Are Needed

These differences call for patient understanding on the part of neighbors and friends who seek to be helpful in very practical and personal ways. Some suggestions are offered as to how church men and women, motivated by the genuine spirit of brotherly kindness, can render a very important service.

Very practical efforts should be made on a person to person basis to assist Indian Americans in those cases where a radically new environment is causing confusion. Christian women who have been carefully chosen and briefed will

probably be especially effective in making the initial contacts. Visits to the home by women are more in keeping with Indian ways. Women can be most helpful to the wife and mother whose new role in the city is often especially lonely and difficult, and they can probably win the children more readily. As in all social change the children are the best communicators and educators of their parents.

There will be opportunities to counsel with and encourage the family in their *church associations*. The church can be perhaps the best agent for helping Indians find a warm, friendly environment to overcome their timidities and "lostness". Most Indians already have church affiliations on the reservation, either Protestant or Roman Catholic, and should be tactfully guided towards the church of their choice. There may already be "an Indian" church or mission in the urban community. Like other ethnic groups Indians may gravitate to people of similar background. Such a tendency needs to be understood. Among Indian Americans folk loyalties are likely to be stronger than denominational ones. When such voluntary cultural segregation takes place, efforts should be directed towards helping such a church or mission to strengthen its program and towards developing and making more meaningful its relationships with other non-Indian churches. At the same time continuing efforts should be made to help Indian Americans feel at home with persons of other backgrounds.

Indian Service Relocation officers in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver and Chicago have rather complete listings of Indians whom they have assisted in relocating, together with church preferences and addresses. Cooperation will be given by such officers when asked for by responsible interdenominational committees.

Indian families can be assisted in finding reliable but *reasonably priced stores* for buying food, clothing, shoes, medicines, furniture and other necessities. It will be helpful to recommend *physicians, clinics, hospitals and dentists*. Indian wives may be tactfully helped in *budgeting*, in avoiding excessive installment buying, in planning for life insurance and other savings, in renting or home buying, and in meeting income and property taxes which may be unfamiliar requirements. Such simple decisions as to *proper attire for the job*, for shopping and for social occasions may indicate the need for guidance.

Housing may present very real difficulties. Indian Americans often are not experienced in judging values, locations, household equipment, whether renting or purchasing living quarters. Unprincipled agents may take advantage, prejudiced neighbors may "cold shoulder" or even agitate against an Indian neighbor. Introductions and interpretations to new neighbors made by an understanding person may ease the situation markedly.

The more complicated *school* situation, with the Indian child perhaps the only one of his or her race in the classroom, offers an excellent opportunity for friendly counsel by the concerned Christian acting as an interpreter to the parents, principal, the teachers and the P.T.A. group.

The local public school or the local church may offer *adult classes* in English, civic problems, health or even vocational unless informed and encouraged.

Indian children in the city school situation where the school and classes are large and the regime more impersonal will frequently need, especially during the first weeks or months, some *extra tutoring* from a friendly adult or fellow student.

To the newcomer from any rural environment, the complexities of urban living are baffling and even at times frightening. Some areas of confusion and difficulty center around the use and repair of household equipment, how and where to get help in times of illness, how to travel about in large cities, how to deposit and draw out money, and how to cope with prejudice and discrimination. The many, and probably strange, laws and legislations are no less baffling. There is often need for detailed explanation and demonstration.

The use of *leisure time* in the city presents problems for the newcomers of all ages and cultural backgrounds. The recreational activities of the tribal community are no longer available. Instead a person is on his own to find his en-

tertainment or recreation on a much less personal basis. Much is offered, cafeteria style, — the movies, the burlesque theater, the tavern, the dance hall, the prize fight arena — more often than not with a price tag attached.

Churches with a social program for family groups and for various ages are a rich resource, with little or no cost attached. Here the problem is one of communication and genuine welcome. The pastor's real concern and his leadership are highly important. Lay people can be enlisted as they have been in past efforts to assist refugees from Europe and Japanese Americans from the relocation centers. The YMCA and the YWCA, Sunday church schools, vacation church schools, church youth fellowships, neighborhood houses, boy and girl scout troops, extra-curricular activities in public schools, organized community-sponsored recreation, art classes, — these are highly important avenues for the constructive release of energies and creative capacities of boys and girls and older persons too as well as assuagers of loneliness. This will be true provided leaders and members will take time and trouble to reach out for the shy Indian child, youth or adult.

Indians will have a major *adjustment to make on the job*. Punctuality, work speed and regularity, unfamiliar routines, many strangers, monotony, new machine skills to be acquired, union-management relationships and responsibilities, all add up to formidable difficulties to be overcome. An understanding employer and work supervisor can be immensely helpful in creating self-confidence and softening the impact of the strange and forbidding impersonality of the industrial job situation.

Organization for Fact-Finding and Education

To accomplish the kinds of service suggested above will require some degree and type of organization, tailor-made to the local situation. In cities where a sizeable number of Indian Americans have migrated and become more or less permanent residents, there may well be an over-all or cross-sectional community committee. In Tucson, Arizona, which lies close to the large Papago Reservation, the Association for Papago Affairs has been at work for about three years. The Association is made up of Indians and non-Indians. In certain states there are official governmental commissions on Indian Affairs. There also may be a statewide voluntary group as in New Mexico and Arizona. Local committees should keep in close touch with such state bodies.

The local committee will normally have as its primary responsibility the welfare of the Indian residents, including their integration into the total life of the community. If no such committee exists or seems feasible at the start the Council of Churches or the Council of Church Women (or both together) may take the lead in setting up the committee, broadening its representativeness as interest grows. The local committee should have from an early stage, persons from as many interested organizations and agencies as possible. If the U. S. Indian Service has personnel in the area one or more representatives should be invited at least as consultants. It goes without saying that Indians themselves should be represented in the committee membership.

There may well be need for some fact-finding in regard to number of Indian residents, ages, tribes, religious preferences, felt needs, services available, and the like. A local committee in Minneapolis-St. Paul is about to launch a study.

Other Lines of Action

In this article we have not had space to consider problems of legislation and administration by Federal and state governments or the development of relations with organized groups that seek to work in the field of governmental policy and relations. Nor have we had the opportunity to discuss scholarship grants to assist Indian youths in furthering their education beyond high school.

Copies of this article are available from the Department of Racial and Cultural Relations, 297 Fourth Ave., New York. 4¢ each; \$3.00 per hundred.